

Defining Time: The Argument for a Paradigm Shift in Air Force Thinking

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“Time is the coin of your life. It is the only coin you have, and only you can determine how it will be spent. Be careful lest you let other people spend it for you.”

- Carl Sandburg (Attributed)

Introduction

It is a common adage in the Air Force that Airmen are the service’s most valuable strength. Air Force doctrine echoes this statement; however, it neglects to adequately define an Airman’s most important asset –time – as the finite resource that it is.¹ With fiscal challenges ahead, and a continuing reduction in the Total Force planned through 2017, the Air Force must manage all of its resources effectively and efficiently, carrying this theme into an institutionalized vision of time and time management.² This institutionalized vision must include

¹ Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, pg. 12-13

² The Air Force Fiscal Year 2013 National Defense Authorization Act Implementation Plan: A Strong Total Force for the Future, pg. 2

a definition of time and the organization's desired perception of time across the force. The vision must also explore the balance between duty time and personal/family time to help Airmen cope with the job demands of contingency operations, physical fitness, and personal and professional development.

Applying a Company Grade Officer's perspective to current Air Force doctrine and officer development, it is clear that there are many job and personal/family requirements competing against Airmen's finite quantity of time. Without clear priorities or guidance on work and family balance, over the long term, the time allotted to duty requirements encroach upon the limited time available for an Airman's personal/family life. With 42% of officers responding to the latest climate survey that they do not have enough time during duty hours to accomplish their standard daily workload, it is clear that the Air Force must take action across the entire organizational enterprise to more clearly delineate the separation of work and personal/family time, as well as help individuals and organizations more efficiently use the scarce resource of time.³ This must be accomplished through a top-down paradigm shift on how the Air Force views time as a resource. The Air Force should define Airmen's time as a finite resource, institutionalize priorities, and reassess the value of Airmen's tasks.

The Problem: Time Definition

A review of current Air Force doctrine points to three problems regarding time: (1) Airmen's time is not clearly defined, (2) a paradox of priorities exist--"everything is important", and (3) time is not viewed as a finite, expendable resource.

³ 2012 Air Force Climate Survey Results. Headquarters Air Force, 7 December 2012. Slide 8.

First, Airmen's time is not clearly defined. Current guidance states that Airmen are always on duty, 24 hours a day.⁴ While this time commitment to service is part of military life, Airmen must also balance physical, mental, social and spiritual needs through Comprehensive Airman Fitness. Personal/family time contribute directly to an Airmen's ability to accomplish the mission; "A Service member's family's health plays a key role in sustained success".⁵ Current doctrine attempts to capture this idea, noting that "Airmen have a duty to the Service and an equally strong duty to their families," yet this statement directly conflicts with the core value of *Service Before Self* and the concept of sacrifice as outlined in the same document.⁶ There is a need to delineate between the intent of an Airmen being "on duty 24 hours a day" and an Airmen "working 24 hours a day." A business term called *scope creep* suggests that a project can infinitely expand if it is not clearly defined.⁷ Similar to this concept, poorly defining Airmen's time may be a root cause for "spillover," where duty requirements creep into home life.⁸ Once Airmen's time is clearly defined, the next logical step is to prioritize time, especially on-duty time.

One could argue that on-duty time is poorly prioritized within the Air Force, creating a culture that prioritizes everything. In such a paradigm, every task seems as important and urgent as the next. According to the world-renowned expert on time management, Stephen Covey, "There is a difference between importance and urgency; [modern people have] become addicted

⁴ Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, pg. 12.

⁵ Air Force Comprehensive Fitness Briefing, 7 Mar 12, Slide 20: "A Service member's family's health plays a key role in sustained success and must be incorporated into any definition of total fitness."

⁶ Air Force Doctrine Document 1-1, pg. 13, 20.

⁷ Bevins, Frankki; Smet, Aaron De. Making time management the organization's priority. McKinsey Quarterly. 2013, Issue 1, pg 26-41.

⁸ Gryzwacz, Joseph, et al. *Work-Family Spillover and Daily Reports of Work and Family Stress in the Adult Labor Force*. Family Relations, 2002, 51 (1). 28-36.

to urgency. When urgency takes over our lives there is no room for importance.”⁹ Covey makes the argument that the most important aspect of time management is prioritization. Time management “has increasingly become an organizational issue whose root causes are deeply embedded in corporate structures and cultures.”¹⁰ This is no different in the Air Force, which also suffers from “initiative overload” where “projects get heaped on top of ‘day jobs’ with a variety of unintended consequences,” including less time for primary duties and other requirements on military members.¹¹ Aside from additional duties, Airmen have to prioritize Professional Military Education (PME), Continuing Education (CE), Advanced Academic Degrees (AAD), Mission Readiness (MR), Physical Fitness (PF), primary duties, and personal/family life. Stephen Covey notes “time management can be captured in a single phrase: Organize and execute around priorities.”¹² If an institution can clearly define priorities, then time can be thoughtfully allocated as a finite resource.

Third, the Air Force as an institution does not treat time as a resource. To synthesize a useful organizational concept of time, the Air Force must first define time as a quantifiable, manageable, finite resource. It should be managed no differently than fuel in an aircraft or funds for a unit’s fiscal year budget - its use thoroughly planned and subsequently executed carefully, intelligently, and efficiently. Just as there are fuel management procedures, the Air Force should provide time management tools or procedures to ensure Airman are appropriately managing their time resource. Airmen already divide time into the two categories of duty and personal/family time, yet institutional priorities against this division are not clear. While the long-term requirements of Airmen are well defined through fitness standards, promotion guidance, and the

⁹ Dodd, Pamela. *The 25 Best Time Management Tools & Techniques*. Chichester, UK: Peak Performance Press, 2005. 89-279. eBook

¹⁰ Bevins, Frankki; Smet, Aaron De. Making time management the organization's priority. *McKinsey Quarterly*. 2013, Issue 1, pg 26-41.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Covey, Stephen. *The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*. Pg. 149

Continuum of Learning, there is no guidance for the effective use of time in the short-term. An unbalanced on/off-duty life directly affects the Air Force's ability to sustain mission ready Airmen through troubling high rates of suicide and divorce. In its discussion of high suicide rates in the Air Force, the Comprehensive Airman Fitness program defines the mental pillar as "the ability to effectively cope with unique mental stressors and challenges needed to ensure mission readiness," adding, "A servicemember's family's health plays a key role in mission success"¹³ The latest Air Force Vision document aims to shift non-valuable duty time to personal time: "Through a personalized, career-long building block approach, we will eliminate duplicative and extraneous training, *returning valuable time to our Airmen* [emphasis added]".¹⁴

How to Define Time

¹³ <http://www.standard.net/stories/2013/01/14/air-force-suicides-16-2012>

¹⁴ Air Force Vision Document, 1-11-2013, pg 2

Time management theory offers the building blocks for producing a useful definition of time. According to Covey, first generation time management consisted of notes and checklists to establish an order among various time demands. Second generation theory was future oriented and based on appointment books and calendars. The third generation of time management

	Urgent	Not Urgent
Important	I <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Crises ➤ Pressing problems ➤ Firefighting ➤ Major scrap and rework ➤ Deadline-driven projects 	II <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Prevention ➤ Production capability activities ➤ Relationship building ➤ Recognizing new opportunities ➤ Planning ➤ Re-creation
Not Important	III <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Interruptions ➤ Some calls ➤ Some mail ➤ Some reports ➤ Some meetings ➤ Proximate pressing matters ➤ Popular activities ➤ Some scrap & rework 	IV <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Trivia ➤ Busywork ➤ Some mail ➤ Some phone calls ➤ Time-wasters ➤ Pleasant activities

Figure 1: Steven Covey's Time Management Matrix

theory aims to prioritize and assign value to activities.¹⁵ “Rather than focusing on things and time, fourth-generation expectations focus on preserving and enhancing relationships and accomplishing results.”¹⁶ In order to help prioritize while simultaneously preserving and enhancing relationships, Covey introduces the *Time Management Matrix* (see figure 1). The distinction between urgency and importance creates a matrix of four categories. We spend the majority of our time dealing with non-important, urgent activities in quadrant III, such as phone calls and interruptions. Quadrant I contains the most important and urgent tasks. There is a danger in only focusing on this quadrant; “As long as you focus on [this quadrant], it keeps getting bigger and bigger until it dominates you.”¹⁷ Covey urges fourth-generation time managers to focus on the most important things in life; these are the high-priority but not urgent issues, represented in quadrant II.

¹⁵ Covey, Stephen. Pg. 76

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

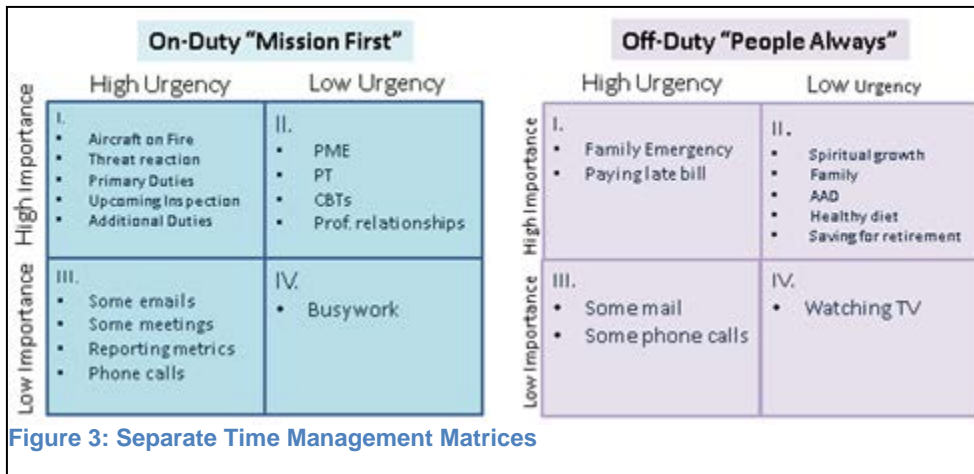
Utilizing this technique for Airmen's time quickly dissolves the paradigm of "Everything is important; therefore, nothing is." Quadrant III includes tasks in an Airman's career that are not important but urgent such as some emails and meetings (see figure 2). Quadrant II tasks that are important but not urgent include PME, AAD, and PT. This quadrant's tasks are commonly neglected because they are not urgent. Lack of planning and too much procrastination will drive tasks from quadrant

	High Urgency	Low Urgency
High Importance	I. • Aircraft on Fire • Threat reaction • Primary Duties • Upcoming Inspection • Additional Duties • Family Emergencies	II. • PME • AAD • PT • Family/Relationships • CBTs • Healthy diet
Low Importance	III. • Some emails • Some meetings • Reporting metrics • Phone calls	IV. • Watching TV • Busywork

Figure 2: Airmen's Time Management Matrix

II into quadrant I. For instance, if Airmen put off weekly PT, then it becomes urgent the month leading up to an Airman's Physical Fitness Test. The converse of this is that if an Airmen's day is filled with constant "fires" from quadrant I and III, there is not adequate time for Quadrant II.

The process of separating what's urgent and important helps prioritize, but it does not resolve the inherent dilemma of "mission first, people always," which can send the mixed message of "mission first, family first?" The solution for this is to formally recognize that Airmen have *two separate* time management matrices (see figure 3): on-duty (mission) and off-duty (personal/family). This solves two problems: (1) it alleviates the Air Force from prioritizing personal/family over or under the mission, and (2) it allows Airmen the freedom to independently prioritize their off duty time. In essence, this is a formal framework to clarify what it means to put the mission first (during on-duty time) while simultaneously putting family first (during off duty time). A breakout of two separate time management matrices would look as follows:



Covey conveyed the important role that prioritization has in effective time management. This key separation between on-duty and off-duty allows the AF to formalize priorities without a controversial “rack and stack” of spiritual/family/mission. The next evolution of the model is to address the fact that there is not a clean line defining what is on- and off-duty. Family issues can arise during duty-hours; likewise, duty issues can arise during time off. To illustrate this “overlap” the model is expanded as follows (figure 4):

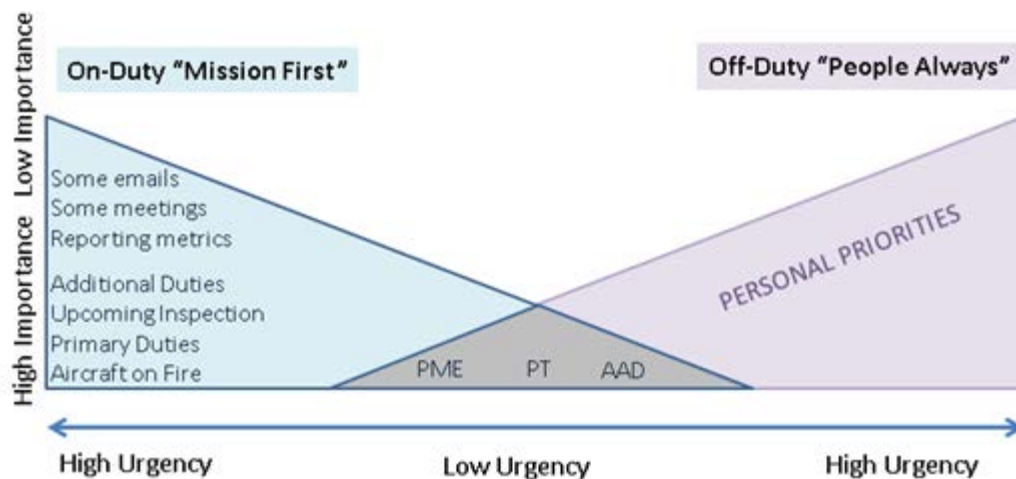


Figure 4: Visualizing the Overlap

Figure 4 illustrates that the “overlap” area corresponds with Covey’s quadrant III--tasks that are highly important but not urgent. PME, PT, AAD are the big three that fall in this region. When an Airman gets overloaded at home or at work, this is the first region to be affected because the tasks are not urgent. As the high urgency on-duty requirements begin to grow, the low urgency duty items further overlap into the off-duty family time, forcing Airmen to accomplish PT, AAD, and PME in the usual time allotted for family/personal time. Using off-duty time for the low-urgency duty tasks has long-term effects that impact resiliency and retention. According to a RAND study on USAF Intelligence Officer Retention, one of the top three reasons for “burnout” was emotional exhaustion.¹⁸ The next logical question to address; if the mission is still getting accomplished, regardless of tasks in Quadrant I or III, why does the Air Force need to change?

With recent Sequestration and looming budget constraints the Air Force can no longer afford to be effective without being efficient. Winston Churchill said it best, “We have run out of money, now we have to think.”¹⁹ In other words, getting the mission accomplished (effectiveness) is no longer a valid reason to settle for inefficiencies. The Vice Chief of Staff, Gen Larry Spencer, released a memo titled “Every Dollar Counts” and stated the need to “Focus our Airmen’s time to clearly identify critical priorities that directly impact the mission, find innovative ways to sustain these tasks, and identify and eliminate those that do not directly relate to mission success.”²⁰

A quick summary thus far: Stephen Covey established that for effective time management, an organization must have clear priorities. The problem is Air Force guidance and

¹⁸ Langley, John. Occupational Burnout and Retention of Air Force Distributed Common Ground System (DCGS) Intelligence Personnel. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2012.

http://www.rand.org/pubs/rgs_dissertations/RGSD306. pg 12

¹⁹ “Every Dollar Counts” Memo dated 28 Mar 2013, Signed Gen Larry Spencer

²⁰ Ibid

doctrine establishes a mixed message of priorities where “everything is important.” Covey provides a framework to solve this problem by separating what is important from what is urgent. The key that allows the Air Force to utilize this framework without touching spiritual/family time is to acknowledge that Airmen have two separate matrices--one for on-duty (mission first) and one for off-duty (people always). When these two matrices are overlaid with high priority/low urgency items in the middle it is clearly visible that there is an area of “overlap” which Covey describes as the most important area for focus. Important issues such as retention, resiliency and mission readiness can be linked to the dangers of mismanaging this area. Due to looming budget cuts, mission accomplishment is no longer a valid reason to remain inefficient. The Vice Chief of Staff is urgently requesting that mission essential priorities be identified and extraneous priorities eliminated.

Ultimately, the desired end state is to start the momentum of an institutional paradigm shift towards managing time as a finite, valuable resource. This process starts with clearly defining time as it applies to expectations of time management and individual time requirements. By then establishing guidance concerning task prioritization and providing tools for time management across the Total Force, time management becomes a priority and a part of the core value of *Excellence in All We Do*.

Budget and Metrics-Based Approach

A paradigm shift coupled with prioritization is instrumental in more effectively managing Airman’s time, but is not sustainable in the absence of practical courses of action implemented from the top down. Since time is a finite resource, one logical path is to treat it in the same manner as other resources the Air Force manages: proactively budgeting and reflectively

assessing results. This active expectation and metric-based approach focuses effort on improving quantifiable results. Air Force staff meetings are not the only arena where this reality is noticed; “The inclusion in performance reviews of explicit, time-related metrics or targets... is a powerful means of changing behavior.”²¹ A behavior change in support of time efficiency is the overall desired end state.

The idea of budgeting time is not foreign; “Establishing a time budget for priority initiatives might sound radical, but it's the best way to move toward the goal of treating leadership capacity as companies treat financial capital and to stop financing new initiatives when the human capital runs out.”²² A time budget based on solid priorities creates a foundation of efficiency that the institution can justify. Junior organizational members would be more efficient and structured by working with senior members to better understand how the organization views their time should be spent. Budgeting also establishes informal goals that warrant achievement.

Our senior Air Force leadership should implement a time budget in lieu of a less-effective process. Without the budgetary approach to Airmen’s time, another approach may consume more time than it saves. This is important on both the macro and micro scale since a time budget could be set up for an organization at any level, including an individual. The organizational budget could be tailored to support commander’s intent and priorities in concert with their resource of Airman’s time. The individual budget must be flexible, simple, and personal to align with the intent of efficiency. Many implementation options exist, but the desired end state is one in which all levels of leadership are cognizant of the limits on Airmen’s time and that these limits are taken into consideration as new initiatives are implemented or new tasks are assigned.

²¹ Bevins, Frankki; Smet, Aaron De. Making time management the organization's priority. McKinsey Quarterly. 2013, Issue 1, pg 26-41.

²² Ibid.

Time itself is a zero sum concept in that it is naturally limited and irreplaceable; using a budget will help illustrate that in order to accommodate one thing something else must give. A second order effect is the creation of documentation, whether formal or informal, that can be used as constructive feedback.

The assessment capability stemming from this course of action is vitally important and would help institutionalize a paradigm shift. Establishing metrics to assess goals is commonplace in the Air Force, and quantifiable results are more conducive to gaining leadership support. Presenting person-hours on a project against an approved budget or a historical baseline creates accountability for the resource of time and the stage it is presented on often determines its importance. Of course, a good metric provides data that allows leadership to make informed decisions.²³ Therefore, time metrics should be focused on improving efficiency and resource expenditure as it aligns with stated priorities.

Value Stream Mapping Approach: Setting Career Field Priorities

An alternate COA is to create an adaptable model borrowing from the idea of Value Stream Mapping, a concept of Lean Operations. Value Stream Mapping (VSM) is a framework through which processes are critically analyzed to determine the current state of affairs, identify value added versus non-value added activities, and eliminate waste.²⁴ In his book *Lean Thinking: Banish waste and create wealth in your corporation*, Dr. James Womack of the Lean Enterprise Institute defines non-value added activities as those activities which “absorb resources

²³ Augustine, Thomas; Schroeder, Charles. An Effective Metrics Process Model. The Journal of Defense Software Engineer. 1999

²⁴ Frater, M. No Time, No Money? Get Lean. Journal of Housing and Community Development. Nov/Dec 2005. pg 6-12.

but create no value.”²⁵ For the purpose of this paper, we define value-added tasks as those tasks having a direct bearing on accomplishing mission objectives or senior leader priorities. While intended for manufacturing, the basic principles could be applied to costs associated with service functions to identify which tasks add value, or in the case of a highly efficient or an inefficient but legally required process, to identify which tasks add the *most* value.²⁶

Identifying where active duty personnel currently spend their time will create a picture of current operations, allowing leadership to understand the myriad of tasks that exist, the level at which these tasks are being accomplished, and what proportion of time is spent on particular tasks. Armed with this data, managers could study the effect of these individual tasks on identified mission priorities, effectively allowing them to identify which tasks are value-added. Having identified non-value-added activities, action could be taken to remove those tasks.²⁷ If, as previously mentioned, these tasks cannot be discontinued for one reason or another, they will still be identified for inclusion at the lowest levels of importance in task prioritization guidance.

Segmenting the tasks even further, into three or four levels of “value” categories such as “High-Value; Mid-Value; Low-Value; and No-Value” added, enables supplementary specificity in outlining task priorities. Additionally, the data gleaned from identifying the current state of operations allows managers to analyze if personnel are spending their time in line with organizational priorities (i.e. if they are spending the bulk of their time on value added tasks or on non-value added tasks). Force development tasks should also be examined insofar as they are aligned with senior leader priorities; such examination ensures the time being spent on those

²⁵ Womack, J.P. and Jones, D.T. *Lean Thinking-Banish waste and create wealth in your corporation*. Simon & Schuster, New York, NY, USA. 1996

²⁶ Frater. *No Time, No Money? Get Lean*. Pg 6-12

²⁷ *Ibid*.

tasks-as opposed to mission oriented tasks-reflects the amount of emphasis senior leadership intended to place on Airmen development.

Once tasks have been identified and assigned a “value” category, they can be prioritized for execution accordingly based on the level of impact a certain task has to a specific mission set in line with Air Force priorities as established by the Chief of Staff. As there will likely be several tasks that are found to fit into any particular category, it will then be necessary to prioritize them within their category based on the priority of the mission they impact. For instance, in line with a recent Air Force top priority of reinvigorating the nuclear enterprise, a dual capable bomber aircraft which required nuclear and non-nuclear focused sorties could logically categorize both of these sorties as “High-value added” but nuclear based sorties would be a higher priority than completing non-nuclear sorties since it supports the higher level priority.²⁸

In order to allow maximum flexibility, as well as the most effective identification/prioritization of tasks across AFSCs and mission sets, this model should not be employed at an Air Force wide level but rather the model should be developed at the Air Force level and executed through AFSC functional managers and commanders. Returning to the previous example of a dual capable bomber, it is unlikely that someone outside of the dual capable bomber community would be in a better position to understand all the tasks necessary to maintain currency and ensure readiness than a member of that specific community. This arrangement also allows for a faster response to newly published or updated guidance while still allowing for uniformed priorities across capabilities while maximizing buy-in at the operational level. Ideally the result of this career field-level prioritization would be widely distributed by

²⁸ Donley, M.B., and N.A. Schwartz, Air Force Strategic Plan, 2008, p. 5.

functional managers and updated regularly to capture any changes driven by world events or shifts in senior leadership priorities.

Having a task list prioritized by functional managers and commanders creates a framework from an individual can make more efficient time use decisions. By outlining and widely disseminating this information, Airmen at all levels would have a snapshot of which tasks should be prioritized above others as the Air Force seeks to further clarify what is meant by “accomplishing the mission.” This would serve as a tool to guide supervisors in deciding which tasks/timelines are worth requiring personnel to sacrifice personal/family time for the benefit of the service and the nation, while simultaneously reinforcing the desired paradigm shift regarding how the Air Force as an institution views Airmen’s time.

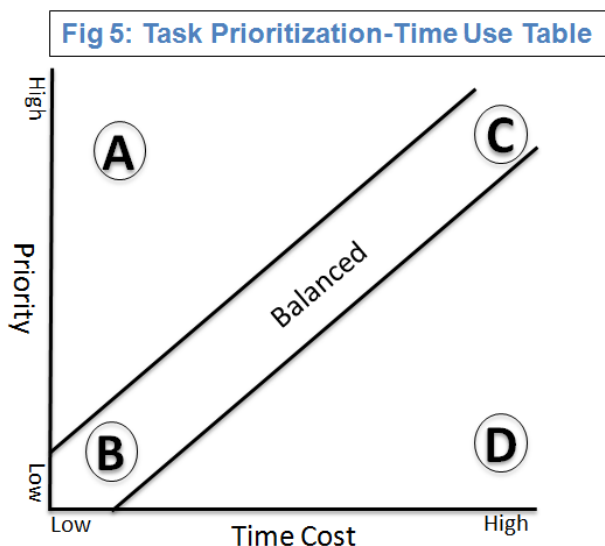
A Blended Approach

As demonstrated, the Air Force currently lacks any system or framework that treats time as a valuable resource. In an effort to provide such a model we present a blended approach of the two options listed above. Utilizing a value stream mapping or a time budgeting/metrics-based approach to address time management issues in the Air Force would be effective if executed individually; however, both courses of action are limited. The budget/metric approach helps solidify the idea of time as a resource, but is vulnerable to letting the budget set the priorities instead of priorities setting the budget. Metrics are risky, as numbers get skewed and the same priority dilemma exists. The value stream mapping approach is a great starting point for setting priorities, and ideally Airmen would restructure their efforts around these priorities. However, a likely outcome would be highlighted priorities but business as usual. For these reasons, employing a combination of the two methods would increase both effectiveness and efficiency

within our institution, creating a multidimensional approach to the problem. This approach not only frames the quantity of time, but why the individual spends it.

Under this construct, value stream mapping prioritizes time management within organizations and career fields, while time budgeting or metrics facilitates efficiency by creating universally understood methods to analyze time allocation within clearly defined organizational and career field priorities. Research illustrates that people will tend to focus their time and efforts toward activities that are rewarded “often to the exclusion of activities not rewarded” regardless of an organization’s stated priorities.²⁹ In order for decision makers to properly align Airmen’s priorities with institutional priorities they first need to know what their Airmen’s perceived priorities are based on a totality of formal (published guidance) and informal (rewarded behavior) guidance. Additionally, data is needed on how much time is actually being currently allocated to certain tasks. This data could be gathered via a task priority and time allocation survey completed at all levels of the Air Force. In the survey, commanders and organizational members could rank order the list of tasks by priority, then assign a percentage of time that *should* be allocated to each task and a percentage of *actual* time allocated to each task. This data would show any divergence between perceived and actual priorities within an organization. Further, it would show incongruity between time allocation and task priorities

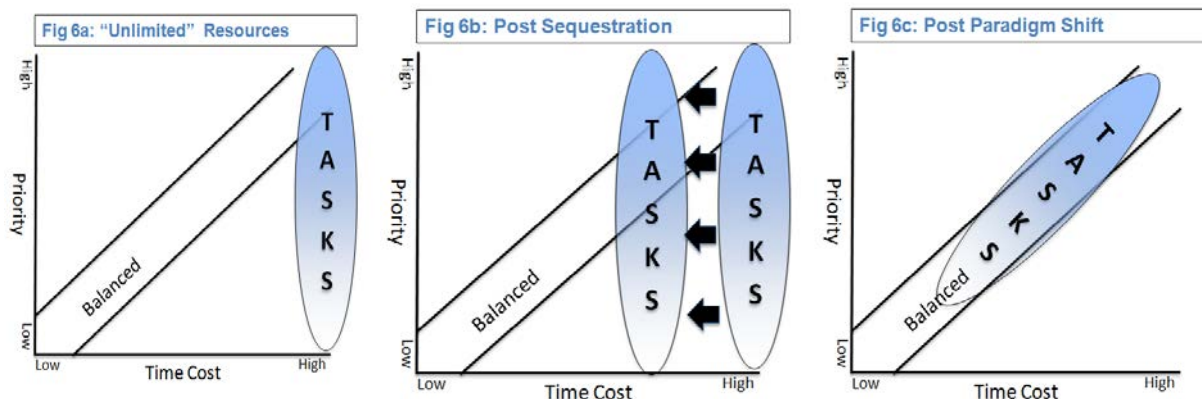
within a finite time budget, although this data should be revisited regularly to ensure currency.



Representing priorities versus time spent graphically can make identifying problem areas

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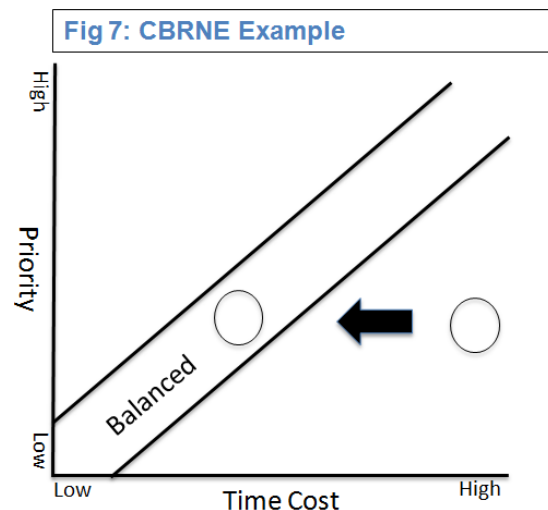
significantly easier. A metrics-based chart similar to that shown in Figure 5 could be used to provide a consolidated view into the efficiencies and inefficiencies for individuals and/or organizations. The Y axis represents priorities and the X axis represents the amount of time spent on those tasks. Ideally, a scatter plot of all organizational tasks should fall along a line of best fit that runs roughly from the origin upward with a slope of 1. Being located along this ideal line indicates personnel are allotting the appropriate amount of time to a certain task for its given priority. If a task falls above the ideal line that indicates a high priority task that does not receive a lot of time allocation. Further examination would determine if the Airman or organization is executing these tasks in an extremely efficient manner. If so, such processes should continue and the organization benchmark them (if they are not already doing so). If a task falls below the ideal line, this indicates low priority (read low to non-value added), but a lot of time in nonetheless assigned to this task. These tasks require immediate attention to determine if there is any duplication of effort, if organizational awards are inadvertently encouraging these inefficiencies, or if these are tasks that can simply be discarded.



It is easy to presume that if resources (i.e. time, money, and people) are unlimited or treated as unlimited, an organization will allocate considerable resources to all tasks regardless of

priority due to the resource surplus. As a result, tasks would tend to be lined up to the far right of the graph in a relatively vertical line indicating that, because they are available, lots of resources are allocated to all tasks as noted in Figure 6a. This is of particular note for a military service that has recently emerged from the Global War on Terrorism where resources were often easily obtainable and most tasks were treated as high priority. While Sequestration has certainly terminated the feeling of nearly unlimited resources, it simply shifted that vertical line to the left. This indicates a similar paradigm toward time management but in a different proportion (Figure 6b). Ideally, this model will identify these inefficiencies and disconnects, enabling the organization to take appropriate action to realign time more appropriately by either reducing the amount of time spent on low value tasks, increasing the amount of time spent on high value tasks, or both. This would cause the bottom of the line to swing to the left and to fall more in line with the ideal line, thus indicating that time is being allocated in the most efficient manner possible. Figure 6c illustrates this shift. If institutionalized, these measures could shift the paradigm of time management from a tacit discussion to a concept that empowers leaders at all levels of command to drive significant changes within their organizations.

To illustrate the tool's potential use, the authors plotted the priority of the Chemical, Biological, Radiological and high yield Explosive (CBRNE) training against its time cost across the enterprise. At eight contact hours for the active duty force, the cost in time to the Air Force is approximately 2.6 million hours every two years. Using the proposed tool, a commander can see a disproportionate cost to the moderately low priority of CBRNE training, flagging this activity for deeper



review and rebalancing of cost. Upon further investigation, the commander would discover duplication in training that is unbalanced against the threat of attack. Although CBRNE training is a constant requirement, the reality is that members that travel to a high risk area such as the Korean Peninsula receive mandatory training upon arrival and experience multiple exercises during their time there. The converse is that CONUS members must still expend eight hours despite an extremely low threat and the fact that not all bases even have the equipment for members to take home. As an example of how to rebalance the cost aligned with the low priority, a commander can reduce the requirement to a strictly hands-on or online training for the bi-annual requirement, with the understanding that additional training will be given before entering an increased threat area. By removing just half of the contact hours, the cost would be cut by 1.3 million man-hours, realigning the cost against the lower priority as seen by the shift in Figure 7. This example could be replicated for any level of organization to provide data to commanders to make relevant changes.

A Question for Further Research

In the course of developing this paper several questions arose that will require additional follow up research. First and foremost, while there are “gate keeper” entities for other major Air Force resources such as fuel and money, nothing similar exists to for determining time budgets. Our research team considers the establishing of a time management agency within the service to be an absolute immediate priority. A question for further study is if such a “gate keeper” entity would be warranted, and if so, where such an entity should reside and what, if any, limitations would the decisions made by that entity levy on a commander’s inherent authority to use his resources as he sees fit.

Call to Action

If people truly are the Air Force's most valuable assets then the Air Force needs to shift its paradigm and view Airman's time as a finite resource. The Air Force must take action across the entire organizational enterprise to help individuals and organizations use the resource of time more efficiently and effectively. The Air Force can solve this task by viewing Airman's time as a finite resource, institutionalizing priorities, and reassessing the value of Airman's tasks. The models presented herein are designed to be used as decision making tools at the macro (Air Force enterprise level) and micro (all subsequent echelons) as tools that commanders can use to make informed decisions regarding the use of their Airmen's time.

We can no longer support a culture of "everything is important" or the demands of "do more with less." Neither of these approaches are the right answer for the Air Force. Instead, the focus should be, "Don't do more with less, do more important things with the available time." Combining the benefits of value stream mapping style priorities with a time budgeting/metrics-based approach would increase both effectiveness and efficiency in the Air Force. This approach would prioritize time management within organizations and career fields while creating methods to analyze time allocation within organizations and career fields.